

July 24 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1993

choose to go to the Moon and to do other things not because they're easy but because they're hard, because the challenges are ones we are willing to accept, unwilling to postpone, and ones we intend to win."

We should be willing to accept this challenge, unwilling to postpone it, and let's intend to win.

Thanks for listening, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 8 p.m. on July 22 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on July 24.

Remarks to the American Legion Boys Nation

July 24, 1993

The President. Thank you very much, and please be seated. I told the Vice President what I was about to do, and he wanted to come out and say hello to you. But he has another meeting; he's trying to pass our economic plan, so he has to go. He just wanted to say hello. So I'm going to let him come up here and say a few words to you, so he can go back to work while I have a good time with you.

The Vice President. Thanks very much. I know this is a very exciting day for all of you. And I want to wish you well. And if there is anyone here who has in the back of his mind any notion at all of going into public service or politics, I only have one word of advice. If you can manage somehow to get a picture of you shaking hands with President Clinton here today, it might come in handy later on. *[Laughter]*

The President. Thank you very much, and welcome. I want to acknowledge the presence here of the national commander of the American Legion, Roger Munson; and the national chaplain, James Wagner; the executive director, John Sommer; and the director of activities, Jack Mercier, who was at Boys Nation 30 years ago when I was here—he started I think 31 years ago; George Blume, the legislative director; and a number of people here from my time of involvement, including one Member of Congress, a Republican from Minnesota, Congressman Jim Ramstad. Where are you? Stand up there. I think all of you know that we're also having a 30-year reunion here this weekend, those of us who were here with me. And the organizer of that was Judge Pete Johnson from Alabama. Pete, where are you? Stand up over there. Gary Sammons, the chair of the National Americanism Commission, is here, the policymaking body that oversees Boys Nation. He was a Michigan Boys Stater in 1963. And I'm just curious.

Would all the people who are here from our reunion class of '63 please stand up. See, they look pretty good, don't they? None the worse for the wear. *[Applause]* Thank you.

Let me say to all of them, we're going to have this ceremony, I'm going to take pictures with the young men who are here as delegates, and then afterward I hope all of you here for the reunion will hang around a little and we'll have a chance to visit, too.

For those of you who are here, I say welcome, and those of you who were here 30 years ago, I say welcome back. All of us share a common bond. We owe a great deal of gratitude to the American Legion for the exceptional chance they have given us and so many others over the last many, many years to learn so much about the responsibilities as well as the rights we have as American citizens.

Three decades to the day have passed since my group and I were here in the Rose Garden to meet President Kennedy. But I think that all of us probably remember exactly how we felt then. It was a very different time for America. There was virtually no cynicism. None of us had any doubt that our country could solve its problems, meet its challenges, bridge its gaps. Nor did we have any doubt that our President, our Congress, the people whom we elected, could faithfully and fully represent us in meeting the great challenges of that day.

One of the most important moments at Boys Nation is the debate about resolutions. And 30 years ago when we were here, believe it or not, we always assumed that President Kennedy would be running for reelection, that Senator Goldwater would probably be his opponent, although there was a lot of turmoil within the Republican Party at that time about who the nominee would be, and that the great issue

would be civil rights. Our Boys Nation group passed a resolution against racial discrimination. Many of us had grown up in segregated societies. We understood the pain, the cost, the incredible waste in human potential that that had caused. And so we voted for it.

I was very proud to be one of the southerners that voted for it, and I think that two others that I remember were my two colleagues from Louisiana. I think they're both here today, and they both voted for it. I remember clearly the discussions we had late at night in the dorms discussing it.

The Nation's Governors had just met that week, and they broke up their resolution conference so they wouldn't have to deal with civil rights. So when we showed up here, President Kennedy said that we had shown more initiative than the Nation's Governors. Now, we loved it, but the Governors didn't like it very much. And it got him in a lot of hot water with them.

Sixteen weeks later, President Kennedy was taken from us before he was able to fulfill his commitments in civil rights. But when President Johnson and the civil rights movement carried it through, it was the greatest domestic achievement of my lifetime, and it helped to make possible so many good things for so many people over the last 30 years, even though, to be sure, the work is nowhere near over.

Most of you now attending Boys Nation were born in 1976, the bicentennial year of our independence. And you will live your entire lives in the third century of America's life. I think about that often because my daughter will soon be your age, and everything that we are working on that really matters is designed as much to help you and your tomorrows as to improve the lives of Americans today.

We have a covenant with you which requires us to make some very tough choices. We have some of the same problems we had in 1963 but some very different ones as well. From the time we became a nation until 1980, we had amassed over that entire life of this country a national debt of only \$1 trillion. As a percentage of our income, it seemed to be quite manageable, and we were still free to invest in those things we ought to invest in. In the last 12 years, partly because of misguided policies, partly because of gridlock, partly because of people trying to outbid one another, we have gone from \$1 to \$4 trillion in national debt. The estimated annual deficit when I took office was well over

\$300 billion, although we've gotten it down some this year. And clearly, we have unmet needs that we don't have the money to invest in.

As compared with many other nations, just for example, we spend too little money on new technologies for the 21st century which will shape the jobs that you and your colleagues will have. We spend too little money on the continued education and training of our work force. We have all kinds of other challenges occasioned by the build-down of the reduction in defense spending. We owe it to the people who worked hard to help us win the cold war not to leave them out in the cold, and yet we don't have all the funds we need to spend on that. And yet, we have this enormous debt. It is a terrible dilemma for this country.

We have whole sections of America where unemployment is too high and poverty is too high and the major source of income is drugs and the major organizations that work in society are gangs. We have to change all that. But we have to also free ourselves economically of the paralysis that this enormous annual deficit and the accumulated debt impose. And so we are trying to do that here for you as well as for your parents and your grandparents.

In your lifetime, communism, the great threat of my childhood, has been defeated. I can still remember going to high school assemblies and junior high school assemblies and sitting there being given instructions about how to find the nearest bomb shelter and what we would do if a nuclear war occurred. I can still remember hearing people speak about what communism was like in the Soviet Union and how there would be a lifelong struggle between the forces of freedom and the forces of communism. Well, in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell, it was a stunning reaffirmation of America's commitment to freedom and democracy and to free market economics and the right of individuals to seek their own way as long as they didn't hurt their communities. That is an incredible achievement. In all probability, you will be able to raise your children without any threat of the annihilation of this society or this globe on which we live.

On the other hand, as we have learned from every source of wisdom beginning with the Scriptures, there will never be an end to problems, never be an end to challenges. It is part of human nature that as new opportunities develop, new problems do, too. We have to do

something about our debt here. We have to invest. We have to compete. We have to create opportunities for your future. We also have to recognize that the world remains a dangerous place, and there are people running governments who desperately want to develop weapons of mass destruction and have very little concern what is done in retaliation to their own citizens. That is a deeply troubling thing. We still face the threat of terrorism from people who honestly believe that the best way to achieve their political objectives is to kill, even if they kill innocent people. And we still have the terrible, terrible burden of knowing that in spite of all the progress we have made, there are millions of Americans who do not have the chance to grow up to live to their God-given potential. And until that happens, we will never be as secure, as strong, as full as we need to be.

We are trying, among other things in this administration, to make people believe again that their collective efforts can make a difference. Until the American people can overcome their cynicism and believe that if they act, it can matter, it is going to be very difficult for us to solve the problems of this country. I believe that every Member of Congress, without regard to party, would admit that the National Government has a responsibility to set up a framework within which opportunity can be seized, but that many of our problems have to be dealt with person to person, family to family, school to school, job to job, community to community, at the grassroots level. We have to create a climate in which people are challenged to take responsibility for themselves, their families, and their communities; given as many opportunities to do so as possible. But the nature of the problems we have today require the concerted action of millions of Americans.

The good news about that is that all of you can make a difference. That's why I have worked so hard since becoming President to create this program of national service, which would open the doors of college education on better terms to millions of Americans and then give hundreds of thousands of them—hundreds of thousands of people like you, I hope—the opportunity to pay all or a portion of their college loans back with work for their country, in their communities or in other communities here at home, rebuilding America from the grassroots up and doing it either before, during,

or after college. This national service program can make a fundamental difference to the way we view ourselves and our country. It can make more and more people have the same kind of enthusiasm I saw on your face when the Vice President and I walked in here today. We know you're connected to America. We need to connect everyone else to America, as well.

Right now there's a little bit of political maneuvering going on in the Congress about national service. It's sad to me because we have good Republican and Democratic support for this bill. And I earnestly hope that this whole idea will be saved from becoming a political football. It is too important to America. It has nothing to do with partisan politics and everything to do with giving people a chance to serve their country and, in so doing, to help to build a belief in their country again.

People my age remember President Kennedy starting the Peace Corps. Our fathers and mothers remember when President Roosevelt launched the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression and gave people a chance to build their way out of that depression. In my State I could take you to community after community after community where there are still CCC projects that older people today point to with pride, their hearts swelling, because they, with their own hands, at a time when 25 percent of the American people were unemployed, were given a chance to rebuild their country. We just had a big reunion out in California of the Peace Corps volunteers, and I have named a former Peace Corps volunteer to be the first ex-Peace Corps person to run the Peace Corps. They are swelling with pride to this day for what they did 25 and 30 years ago. And so it will be with national service if we can do it.

I want to say one last thing to all of you. Thomas Jefferson, whose memorial is right back over there and was built 50 years ago this year, was fond of saying that the Earth belongs to the living in trust; that all of us have to balance our lives between doing what is good for us today and what is good for our country, our families, our friends, and our children and grandchildren tomorrow. That means that for all the opportunities you will have, and you young men will have more than most Americans, you have an immense responsibility to give something back to your country. One day you will understand that even more clearly than you

do today, although I wish that Americans twice your age understood it as well as you clearly do at this moment.

Regardless of what you do, remember this: It is not enough in life to have feelings. It is not enough in life to have convictions. You must act on them. You must act on them. You must move. You must do. You must make things happen. That is surely the ultimate lesson of Boys State and Boys Nation. We were given a system by the Founding Fathers which permitted people in every generation of Americans to the end of time to join together and to act, to deal with the challenges, seize the opportunities, and beat back the problems of the day. That is the legacy that you have been given. And that is the responsibility that you must assume.

I can tell you that, to me, it seems only yesterday that I was your age, standing here. It doesn't take long to live a life. But it can be very rewarding if you have convictions, if you believe in your feelings, and if you act.

I wish you well, and God bless you. [Applause] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much.

I'd like now to ask Roger Munson to come forward, and ask the rest of you to sit down. It won't be much longer. I know it's hot out here. When Girls Nation was here a couple of days ago, it wasn't so warm. But it's still a nice day.

[At this point, Arkansas delegates Traftin Thompson and James Welch presented the President with a 1963 photograph of himself with President Kennedy.]

Thank you very much. I think now we're going to take the pictures over here. Is that right? No, we're going to do—we've done that. Oh, they're coming to speak? One of the things that happens to you when you become President is you sometimes don't get good instructions.

[Laughter] Then you just have to fall on the sword.

Who am I supposed to introduce? Pete, are you coming up here? And Jeff Keyes, is he here? Come on.

Let me say, I saw Pete again during the course of the Presidential campaign. And until that happened, I had one Boys Nation person who went to Georgetown with me who was in my class; the two guys from Louisiana, one who went to Georgetown with me, one who went to law school with me, those two guys I had stayed in close touch with; and one other person who was a delegate from Virginia who I stayed in touch with over the years. Now, when I ran for President, I met so many of them again.

And I wanted to make one other point. It wasn't in my notes, but I'd be remiss if I didn't. It is a very great thing to be given the chance to serve this country as President. But it is a very great mistake to think that that is the thing that counts the most in America. The thing that counts the most in America is the contributions that are made by all Americans who work hard, play by the rules, raise their children well, make their communities stronger. And I was so terribly impressed by learning about the life stories of the other people with whom I was here, the struggles that they'd had, the tragedies they'd faced, the triumphs that they had created. And I want you to remember that, too. Each of you has to serve, and each of you can serve, and each of you can make a difference. And the collective efforts we make are far more important than the individual achievements of any person.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:11 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. Following his remarks, 1963 Boys Nation delegate Jeff Keyes presented him with a plaque and a second photograph with President Kennedy.

Remarks to the Conference on the Future of the American Workplace in Chicago, Illinois July 26, 1993

The President. Thank you very much. Senator Simon, Senator Moseley-Braun, Mayor Daley, President Gross, and my friends and colleagues

Secretaries Brown and Reich, and to all of you in the audience, my old colleague Governor Caperton and the distinguished business and